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SOUTH KOREA: The Day After

Opposition and student protests over the next few days might produce a new round of street violence, but so far most Koreans do not appear to be rallying behind charges that Roh Tae Woo "stole" the presidential election. (b)(3)

Since Roh's victory—with 36.7 percent of the vote—only sporadic protests have occurred in Seoul and in Kwangju, the provincial stronghold of Kim Dae Jung. Both Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam have threatened to overturn the results, however, with each claiming he would have won in a fair contest. Police reports indicate opposition party members and dissidents plan to demonstrate against the election in several locations nationwide over the next several days. According to US Embassy contacts, preelection allegations by Kim Dae Jung of widespread rigging and his third-place showing may compel him to make street demonstrations the keystone of his strategy. (b)(3)

The Embassy also reports that aides of both men have cited only general charges of government cheating. Representatives of international monitoring groups say they plan to withhold their judgment until they can review all the evidence. Even generally pro-opposition journalists and some supporters of both Kims have blamed the opposition's defeat squarely on its failure to unite behind one candidate. (b)(3)

Comment: Popular support of anti-Roh protests may grow, depending on the findings announced by the international monitoring groups. The restrained public reaction to Roh's victory thus far, however, suggests most Koreans are unwilling to challenge his win. (b)(3)

As the third-place finisher, Kim Dae Jung may consider pushing a more provocative strategy, hoping that a government overreaction to protests would rally broad support and strengthen his weak hand. Kim Young Sam may be more cautious, given the public's measured reaction. He may conclude that his foothold among more moderate opposition elements—especially in the middle class—would slip if he joined Kim Dae Jung in anti-Roh protests. (b)(3)

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